European Journal of
Humour Research 6 (2) 123–127
www.europeanjournalofhumour.org

Book review

Yus, Francisco (2016). *Humour and Relevance*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Relevance theory has been designed as a framework which seeks to account for ostensive-inferential communication (initiated by Sperber & Wilson 1986/1995; and developed by Blakemore 1992; Carston 2002; Wilson & Sperber 2004; Clark 2013, among others). Apart from significant studies on this theory concerning fields such as grammar, misunderstanding, identity and discourse, social media and multimodality, cyberpragmatics, metaphor or irony, over the years Francisco Yus has published extensively on the study of humour within this theory (e.g. Yus 2003, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2013, 2017; see also 1998a, 1998b for web pages created and constantly updated by Yus that offer a comprehensive account and the fullest range of all aspects of research undertaken within relevance theory). In this sense, the work being reviewed here is Yus' most remarkable and certainly the most comprehensive publication devoted to the study of humour within relevance theory so far. It offers a consistent, coherent and comprehensive panorama of the ways in which relevance theory can shed light on the understanding of humour. To this end, the book is structured into ten chapters.

Chapter 1 provides the reader with a thorough and updated account of the framework of relevance theory. Thus, the author deepens into the keystone dichotomy or balance between processing efforts and cognitive or contextual effects. In this context, the most important contribution offered by Yus is the distinction between *positive and negative contextual constraints*, on the one hand, and *positive and negative cognitive effects*, on the other hand. Furthermore, Yus highlights the fact that not everything that is communicated is necessarily propositional: non-propositional effects such as emotions, feelings, or impressions will influence the interpretation of any utterance or text, whether humorous, ironic, or of any other kind. Crucially, he shows that the mental *effort* required to process any utterance and the negative non-propositional effects that stem from it should be overridden by the *cognitive effects* attained by the addressee in the interpretation of any utterance, given certain positive contextual constraints and certain positive non-propositional effects.

In particular, he demonstrates that the relevance of humorous utterances is often not associated with any informational or cognitive quality, but it rather tends to exert some influence upon interpersonal, interactive, and social relationships. The idea underlying this chapter is that the understanding of humorous texts will follow the same interpretive process as any other utterance, even though the different phases in this process can be exploited for the generation of humour.

This notion is further developed in Chapter 2, which explores the implications and applications of relevance theory for humour creation, interpretation, and research. The structure of this chapter parallels the presentation of the key notions of relevance theory followed in the previous one, so that the reader can relate each of the central notions of relevance theory with its significance for humour. Thus, on the one hand, *positive/negative contextual constraints* refer to the non-propositional aspects of communication that will decisively influence the successful communication of the speaker's humorous intentions. On

the other hand, the *positive/negative non-propositional effects* will be generated during the communicative process, and will be added, either positively or negatively, respectively, to the effects resulting from the interpretation of the humorous utterance.

Chapter 3 contextualises the relevance-theoretical approach to humour proposed in this book within the historical development of humour research, which has been extensively examined in Attardo (1994). Yus justifies the reasons why relevance-theoretical approaches to humour fit best within incongruity-resolution theories, which are then enriched with a relevance-oriented analysis of the manipulation of those inferential strategies resulting in humorous effects. Moreover, the author contributes his own relevance-based taxonomy of incongruity-resolution patterns, which highlights both the cognitive and the discursive aspects of incongruity.

In Chapter 4, the author revises and improves his own model of humorous communication, which he has termed as the *Intersecting Circles Model* (e.g. Yus 2013). These Circles correspond to utterance interpretation, make-sense frames, and cultural frames, the combination of which will result in the generation of humorous effects. The most substantial application of this model is a classification of jokes. The chapter finishes with a section devoted to puns, of which the author proposes an innovative taxonomy, based on the combination of three main labels or categories involved in the identification and resolution of puns: punning structure, sense relationship, and inferential strategy.

Chapter 5 revisits another topic already discussed in Yus' previous research (e.g. Yus 2005), namely stand-up comedy monologues. This genre allows Yus to show the ways in which relevance theory can approach interpersonal and social communication. This is so because coping with stand-up monologues calls for the management of collective representations of the audience, particularly regarding their social and cultural identities. Yus demonstrates how the comedian sets out to make manifest to each of his/her potential addressees that the assumptions and beliefs that they hold about their life styles are far from individual or private, but quite on the contrary are entertained as collective representations which are shared among the members of the community.

Chapter 6 is devoted to the study of humorous irony from a relevance-theoretical perspective. It is based on Yus' already extensive investigation on irony, and on the incorporation of the most recent research undertaken within relevance theory. The latter includes the application of notions such as metarepresentation, mindreading, or epistemic vigilance for a better account of irony comprehension. Most importantly, the social benefits arising from irony are analysed, Yus' own contribution to the development of contextual sources is revised, and the dissociative attitude that characterises irony within relevance theory is complemented by Yus with his proposal of an *affective attitude*, as a second-order, feeling-, or emotion-related meta-representation.

In Chapter 7, Yus updates his own previous research on the translation of humour from a relevance-theoretical standpoint (e.g. Yus 2012), which is here applied to the translation of jokes. Based on the impossibility to preserve faithfulness to the content or the pragmatic quality of the joke, Yus devises a proposal of cases of translatability springing from the combination of three main scenarios: cultural, semiotic, and pragmatic. This results in three major categories of jokes, namely transferrable, replaceable, and challenging jokes, respectively, depending on their degree of translatability. In turn, the combination of the above scenarios yields sixteen main cases of translatability of jokes. Another major highlight by Yus in this chapter is the account of an itinerary for the translation of jokes based on the relevance-theoretical comprehension heuristic.

Chapters 8 and 9 are devoted to two manifestations of multimodal humour, namely, political cartoons in the press and advertisements, where humour springs from the combination of text and visuals. The author also analyses the role of visual metaphors in cartoons. In order

to account for images, Yus proposes a dichotomy between *visual explicatures* and *visual implicatures*. He shows how the processing of these graphic elements will exert a crucial influence on the addressee's interpretation of the textual aspects in the two genres. Moreover, the addressee will have to choose from some possible interpretations and will do so guided by expectations of relevance, and by getting engaged in inferential processes of mutual parallel adjustment. The different functions or roles played by humour in each kind of discourse are also explained.

Finally, the book closes with Chapter 10, which is devoted to the analysis of conversational humour, which, as was the case with stand-up comedy (Chapter 5), enhances the suitability of relevance theory to account for interpersonal communication. The major functions of conversational humour are detailed, and two possible RT-oriented analyses of conversational humour are proposed. Most interestingly for further research on humour and on relevance theory as a whole, the author ends this major contribution by introducing a distinction between different types of relevance: *partial relevance, sustained relevance, transitional relevance*, and *deferred relevance.* These new forms of relevance may be further explored by the author in later works, and will undoubtedly open new fields of research within the relevance-theoretical framework.

In sum, the work reviewed is undoubtedly an indispensable tool for anyone working in the fields of humour studies and of relevance theory. The author has deeply examined and simultaneously expanded the relevance-theoretical framework with his own genuine contributions to offer the most comprehensive account of humour within this approach. As a result, we may conclude that all four aspects, namely, the understanding of humour, its study as a field of research, the relevance theoretical account of it, and also relevance theory as a whole, have been enriched thanks to the analysis and the contributions offered by Francisco Yus in this work.

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